DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 325 726 CG 022 131

AUTHOR Leroux, Thomas G.; Petrunik, Michael
TITLE The Construction of Elder Abuse as a Social Problem: A Canadian Perspective.
PUB DATE Aug 89
NOTE 38p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society for the Study of Social Problems (39th, Berkeley, CA, August 6-8, 1989).
PUB TYPE Reports - General (140) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Elder Abuse; Foreign Countries; *Older Adults; *Social Problems
IDENTIFIERS Canada

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the referral structure (and the primary definers within this structure) in terms of which elder abuse is being defined as a social problem in Canada and interest groups are being mobilized to deal with the alleged problem. Preliminary research indicates that the major impetus is, in the main, not coming from organizations of the elderly but from various professional groups and governmental agencies who have laid claim to elder abuse as an issue requiring social action. In particular, governmental groups are laying claim to the importance of elder abuse as a public issue based on the graying of the population and the possibility of an increasingly politically important elderly bloc. Resistance or apathy on the part of the elderly themselves, however, and the absence of developed ideologies (e.g., feminism in the case of wife abuse and child sexual abuse) has resulted so far in relatively little being done in the construction of elder abuse as a social problem. (Author)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 252726

THE CONSTRUCTION OF ELDER ABUSE AS A SOCIAL PROBLEM: A CANADIAN PERSPECTIVE

by
Thomas G. Leroux
& Michael Petrunik

C\O: Michael Petrunik
Criminology Department
University of Ottawa
1 Stewart Street
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
K1N 6N5
(613) 564-7851

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Thomas Leroux

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

CG 022 131

The Construction of Elder Abuse as a Social Problem: A Canadian Perspective

Thomas G. Leroux

Michael Petrunik

Biographical Sketch

Thomas G. Leroux is currently a Masters Criminology graduate student at the University of Ottawa. He received an Honors Bachelor of Social Sciences degree in 1988 from the University of Ottawa. Publications consist of "Family Violence & Incompetency: Competing Claims and the Role of Experts in the Construction of Canadian Elder Abuse Policy" in an forthcoming issue of Perspectives on Social Problems. Mr. Leroux has done previous research in the field of social constructionism and social policy and is currently interested in the field of mundane crime.

Biographical Sketch

Michael Petrunik has been an associate professor in the Criminology Department of the University of Ottawa since 1984. Prior to that he was Senior Research Officer with the Research Division of the Ministry of the Solicitor General and a lecturer with the Sociology Department, University of Guelph. Dr. Petrunik received his Ph.D in sociology from the University of Toronto in 1977. Major publications include "Fragile Facades: Adult Stutters and the Strategic Manipulation of Awareness" Social Problems, 31, (Dec., 1983) pp. 125-138; "The 'I' the 'Me' and the 'It': Moving Beyond the Meadian Conception of Self" Canadian Journal of Sociology, 13, No. 4, 1988 pp. 435-448; and "The Politics of Dangerousness" International Journal of Law and Psychiatry, 5, (Fall, 1982) pp. 225-253. Dr. Petrunik's current major research interests are in social constructionism, social problems and social policy.

Abstract

This paper uses the social constructionist approach to social problems as claims-making activities and Blumer's theory of the developmental stages of social problems to analyze how elder abuse has been constructed as a social problem in Canada and how interest groups have been mobilized to deal with the alleged problem. Clearly elder abuse has emerged as a social problem (often under the family violence rubric) and has received some legitimation from professional groups and representatives of government. Efforts to mobilize social action against elder abuse at a national level and to develop legislation and other policy initiatives have, however, so far met with mixed success. While elder abuse has been trumpeted by some claims-makers as a major new form of family violence, the absence of a strong elder lobby group and the absence of developed ideologies (eg. feminism in the case of wife abuse and child sexual abuse) have resulted in elder abuse receiving much less attention than other problems grouped under the family violence rubric. Indeed, most of what legislation presently exists in Canada deals not with the abuse of the elderly as a class but with the provision of services to dependent, incompetent adults whether they are elderly or not.

Running Head: The Construction of Elder Abuse

Introduction:

In the past two decades the social science literature has documented the emergence of several new social problems as subcategories of the more general rubric of family violence. These have included wife battering, child abuse, child sexual abuse, and most recently elder abuse (1),(2),(3),(4). While wife battering and the various forms of child abuse have emerged as full-blown social problems in the view of both professionals and the public and have prompted major social policy initiatives, the issue of elder abuse (despite predictions that it would be recognized as a key family violence problem of the 1980's) has not yet received an equivalent legitimacy. Although it would be premature to say that elder abuse is a failed social problem, it is pertinent to ask what are the factors which might account for the low profile of elder abuse as a social problem relative to the other forms of family violence with which it has been associated. In fact, there are indications (5) that the most viable claims to date in Canada present a view of elder abuse not so much as a problem of family violence but as one of the incompetency of dependent adults to look after their personal affairs, the inadequacy of family care-giving and the lack of appropriate services.

In this paper we use the social constructionist perspective of social problems as claims-making activities and the notion that social problems pass through developmental stages (6),(7) to examine the manner in which the elder abuse issue has emerged in

Canada. Particular attention is given to developments in the province of Ontario and the role of key interest groups in government, social services and health care.

Methodology:

Data for the study were gathered from a variety of sources using primarily qualitative methodological techniques. Newspaper and periodical indexes were searched to assess the emergence of interest in elder abuse. Government reports, statistical data and advocacy group position papers were obtained from an extensive file kept by the Ottawa-Carleton Council on Aging. Telephone interviews with officials at the municipal, provincial and federal levels of government provided an overview of current positions held by various agencies. Personal interviews with representatives of organizations for the elderly established motivations for involvement. Our primary focus was on the degree of involvement of various interest groups in the elder abuse issue. Our data was analyzed with an emphasis on uncovering the forces behind the emergence of elder abuse and the professional groups involved.

The Developmental Stages of Social Problems:

Both Blumer (6) and Spector and Kitsuse (7) have presented models to analytically delineate the stages of claims-making and response to claims that occur in the course of the development of an issue as a social problem. As Best (8, p. 139) notes: "These

models typically describe a process that begins with claims-makers drawing attention to a problem and ends when officials establish a policy to handle the problem".

In this paper we use Blumer's model of social problems as passing through five stages: emergence, legitimation, mobilization of action, formulation of an official plan, and implementation of the plan. Each of these stages is necessarily contingent and in the case of particular problems may not occur. There is also no guarantee that the implementation of a social policy will lead to an issue's final resolution. Social problems rarely die and perhaps most often simply wax and wane. In the following sections we will examine the developmental trajectory of elder abuse as a social problem in Canada and offer some suggestions as to why this issue has followed the course it has so far taken.

Emergence:

The earliest mention of elder abuse we have located in the English language literature is in an article appearing in the British Medical Journal (9). According to M. Hudson (10), the earliest published information on the issue appearing in the United States is Steinmetz's (11) article on battered parents. In Canada, Donna Shell's study (12) and subsequent research papers have succeeded in creating an awareness of an issue where no acknowledgement existed before because, "In not being aware of a problem, a society does not perceive it, address it, discuss

it, or do anything about it. The problem is not there."(6, p. 302).

One of the forces behind the emergence of elder abuse as a social problem has been the public perception of old age as a social problem. Neugarten, in examining social problems relating to old age, questions the "extent to which the old ...are becoming age segregated as well as age separated."(13, pp. 174-175). The elderly are being thrust into a separate and isolated subculture, separate from the rest of society. Neugarten (13, p. 193) states:

> with increasing numbers of retired persons living on fixed incomes, and with the host of other economic and social changes that lead to increasing visibility of the aged as a group, a social movement is being created in which consciousness focuses on age.

This consciousness manifests itself through a view of the condition of old age as a master status and the use of such labels as "elderly" and "senior" to refer to older adults. As a **master status**, old age overrides all other statuses and has the most priority in the characterization of the individual (14, p. 32-33). The popular concept of the aged in North America affixes disease and frailty as an essential element to the status so that

> much of our social policy on aging is flawed because of an inappropriate assumption that the elderly are typically feeble, poor, and sick... The differences in their situations and needs are less salient than their

common disabilities. (15, p. 338)

The assumed need to protect the elderly, because of their perceived helplessness, overrides their status as legally and socially competent adults. This view of the elderly as frail and vulnerable gave impetus to the development of "helping" policies under the guidance of professional experts. Of particular importance has been the development of experts on the elderly in the fields of gerontology and geriatrics as well as in more established disciplines such as nursing and social work (5, p. 10). According to Scott (16, p. 256) experts, such as gerontologists, use their status as professionals to lend legitimacy to the conceptions of stigma they have constructed.

Miller (17) examines aging behaviors as a form of social deviance. The aging role is, "viewed as a consequence of the process of social aging, conceived as part of the natural life cycle, and characterized by some loss of former adult roles" (17, p. 143). This loss of role constitutes the deviance. The role of the elderly is determined not by ability, worth or function but rather by age. Separate policies and services directed towards the aged tend to focus upon individual problems, "while ignoring their marginal economic and social status."(17, p. 150). The typical response to managing such deviance has been the imposition of social control policies formulated on age-based criteria, (ie. of age as a master status). The view of old age as a social problem sets the stage for the call for social action concerning problems arising out of old age. Elder abuse

constitutes one such area of concern.

A second factor relevant to the emergence of elder abuse as a social problem has been the placing of elder abuse under the broader social problems category of family violence. In doing so, elderly persons are viewed as potential targets of a pervasive form of victimization. This categorization of elder abuse contains an implicit warrant of how it is to be taken as an objective concern by the professional community (18, p. 177). The notion of "family violence" and the history of the use of this category are important to understand in considering elder abuse. Involvement by both professionals and the state in "family violence" first appeared with the concern displayed over the 'discovery' of child abuse (2). Social concern over the extent of the child abuse issue laid the groundwork for the study of other problems under the rubric of family violence. Straus (19, p. 348) notes that three factors accounted for the emergence of family violence as a social problem. The first was a greater professional and public sensitization to the issue of violence in the 1960's and early 1970's due to social protest, political assassinations, the reported rise in homicide and assault rates and the Vietnam war. The second was the rise of the women's movement and the third was the theoretical challenge to the consensus model of society by proponents of the conflict approach. Other factors included the implementation of child abuse and neglect reporting laws and the establishment of safe-houses to serve the needs of battered women. These social

developments proved fertile ground for both social scientists and social problems advocates. Through their study of family problems, and specifically family violence, they challenged the ideal of the family as a cohesive unit (20). Elder abuse from this particular perspective came to be viewed as just another topic in the study of the dynamics of violence in the family and the abused elderly as just a newly discovered category of the victims of such violence.

The development of interest in elder abuse can also be linked to criminological interest in the elderly population as a whole (21). An example of this can be seen in a recent annotated bibliography (22) which treats elder abuse as just one concern among many with regard to crime and the elderly. In his preface to the bibliography, Aday (22, p. XI) states:

> Researchers and policy makers began to address many issues associated with the elderly as victims in the early 70's. During this initial period, practitioners in gerontology and geriatrics as well as various levels of the criminal justice system began to focus on elderly victimization as an important social problem.

Cox (23, pp. 127-128) notes that the emergence of criminal victimization of senior citizens as an issue in the United States during the 1970's occurred because of the political climate, the concern over crime, the aging of the population and the political clout the elderly could wield. The process in Canada has been different, however. The criminal victimization of the elderly

has been asserted to be a political issue, less by the elderly themselves than by groups of non-elderly who claim interest in their well-being (24, p. 82). This can be viewed as a culmination of the previously described trend of viewing old age as a problem in itself. Once again, professionals have defined the concerns of the elderly and as such have been the major shapers of the societal response. In dealing with crime as with other issues, the elderly themselves have in the main either not taken part in or been left out of the loop of agencies who assume responsibility for dealing with problems related to old age.

The emergence of elder abuse as a social problem then can be viewed as part of several social trends: the construction of old age as a social problem and the rise of experts on the elderly such as gerontologists; the emergence of the family violence rubric and the inclusion of violence against the elderly as one form of violence under this rubric; and the increased criminological interest in the victimization of the elderly accompanying the 'greying' of the population. In the next section we shall examine the role of interest groups within and without government and the extent to which they have been able to confer legitimacy on the emerging elder abuse problem.

Legitimation:

In examining the extent to which elder abuse has received legitimation from professional and governmental bodies an important concept is that of a 'professional agenda'. This

concept

> ... is used to designate awareness among those members of the public informed about a given issue who may promote a particular view of a problem. (25, p. 20)

Elder abuse has, however, achieved a professional agenda without necessarily possessing a public legitimacy.[4] The legitimacy of elder abuse as a social problem largely rests in the hands of the professionals. It is the focus of attention only of selected interest groups and has yet to achieve extensive public support. Canadian agencies espousing an interest in elder abuse include the Ottawa-Carleton Council on Aging, Toronto Mayor's Committee On Aging, Manitoba Society of Seniors and the Edmonton Interagency Group on Elder Abuse. Elder abuse, not only in Ontario but also the rest of Canada, is undergoing a critical evaluation in its recognition for legitimacy. Some recognition is being granted but the concerted action needed for reform is absent.

Elder abuse, in order to move along the social problem cycle and not die as an issue, requires legitimacy as a public problem not just as a professional concern. Blumer (6, p. 303) notes that, "a social problem must acquire social endorsement if it is to be taken seriously and move forward in its career". In the case of elder abuse in Ontario, this legitimization occurred when the various interest groups picked up the issue as an area encompassed by their mandate. The Toronto Mayor's Committee on Aging (26) cites the 1982 Shell study (12) and the publicity

full [illegible] release as a reason to take up the issue in 1987. Also important was an incident in Toronto involving the death of a 73 year old woman named Lillian Hess in 1981. The subsequent media attention this horrific incident[2] received drew attention to the abuse of elderly persons in general. Also, the issue of [illegible] guardianship in Ontario first gained momentum because of the Hess case. October, 1981 saw the Subcommittee on Aging of the Mayor's Task Force on Disabled and Elderly Persons support the introduction of a provincial Guardianship Act. This led to the creation of a working group by the Toronto Mayor's Committee on Aging to examine Guardianship and the release of a report in 1982. Other groups, including the Advocacy Centre for the Elderly in Toronto have also been outspoken on the issue. Judith Wahl, executive director of the Centre, issued a report to the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association detailing the problem, examining the issue of mandatory reporting, and giving recommendations to ease the problem. According to Wahl (29, p. 10) elder abuse "occurs in the community and is increasing dramatically from year to year." Wahl, however fails to cite any pertinent figures to back up her claim. Though assertions pertaining to data generally must be qualified when presented in a social science forum, no such restrictions are in place when findings are used for a political agenda. A good example of this can be found in a Toronto Globe and Mail (30, p. A11) article entitled, "100,000 Elderly Canadians Abused A Year, panel says". The estimate of 100,000 by the chairman of Toronto Mayor's

Committee On Aging was compiled by adding up claims made by various senior citizen's groups across the country. Nowhere is there a mention of the criteria that groups used to make their assertions, or if reported figures overlapped.

> For legitimation of a problem to occur, it must:
>
> ... acquire a necessary degree of respectability which entitles it to consideration in the recognized arenas of public discussion. ... Do not think because a given social condition or arrangement is recognized as grave by some people in a society - by people who indeed attract attention to it by their agitation - that this means that the problem will break through into the arena of public consideration. (6, p. 303)

One reason why groups have received attention is their relative power vis a vis other groups to make claims. Groups which have a large membership, more money, greater discipline and organization are effective in pressing their claims (7, p. 147). A reason why elder abuse has so far been largely a localized social problem within particular provinces and municipalities and has lacked national prominence is the fact that there is no unified national lobby speaking on its behalf. The groups most involved in elder abuse manifest their power on a provincial level or even a municipal level. However, some legitimation on a federal level is evident in an increased government awareness of elder abuse. Elder abuse was detailed in a 1983 edition of Vis*a*vis, (31) the newsletter of the National Clearinghouse On Family Violence which

is produced by the Canadian Council on Social Development for the Ministry of Health and Welfare Canada.

Other instances of legitimation include work done by the Ontario Advisory Council on Senior Citizens which prepared a report (32) for submission to the Office of Senior Affairs. In Ottawa, the Council on Aging created a ad-hoc committee on elder abuse to study the problem. Its mandate was to enhance awareness of the problem among professionals and the general public of the problem in the community and institutions (33). The formation of the committee was the result of the work of a single member of the Council. The Committee culminated its work with a one day forum held April 20, 1988 and a subsequent report released November 3, 1988 which made 70 recommendations to address elder abuse.

All of the groups referred to above enhanced the legitimation of elder abuse as a social problem. This apparent legitimation of the issue culminated in Blumer's third stage- mobilization of action.

Mobilization of Action:

Mobilization refers to the fact that:

> The problem now becomes the object of discussion, of controversy, of differing depictions, and of diverse claims. ... Discussion, advocacy, evaluation, falsification, diversionary tactics, and advancing of proposals take place in the media of communication, in

casual meetings, organized meetings, legislative chambers,and committee hearings. (6, p. 303)

In Ontario, the Office for Senior Citizen s Affairs in conjunction with the Ministries of Health, Social Services, Justice and the Solicitor General is currently conducting exploratory research on the dimensions of the problem of elder abuse and the legal jurisdiction of each of the Ministries. The Office for Senior Citizen Affairs is reprinting a pamphlet defining elder abuse and outlining how to recognize its occurrence which was originally issued in 1986 by the Toronto Mayor's Committee on Aging. This is interesting to note because Ontario has been a scene of vocal lobbying on the issue of elder abuse by organizations based in Toronto. The Toronto Mayor s Committee on Aging has called for increased awareness by the government and the need for direct action into the problem as far back as 1983 (34, p. 12) Therefore, it is safe to state that the primary definers behind the recognition of elder abuse as a social problem in Ontario are in various organizations operating out of Toronto. The most vocal are the Mayor's Committee on Aging and the Advocacy Centre for the Elderly, a legal aid organization for the elderly. The Ontario Advisory Council on Senior Affairs has also lobbied on behalf of the issue. In the spring of 1986 it produced A Report On Elder Abuse (32) stating information, detailing a definition and making several recommendations such as the need for continued research, a common definition, a central registry of identified abusers and a

mandatory reporting law. Though forwarded to the Office for Senior Citizen Affairs, it has yet to receive substantial Ministerial attention.

The mobilization of action on elder abuse in Ontario rests in the calls for action outlined by the aforementioned groups. The Mayor's Committee has been active in two areas concerning the elderly, abuse and guardianship for the incompetent. The Committee recommends that the government of Ontario develop a uniform reporting procedure with a follow up protocol (26) for cases of alleged abuse. It also seeks the implementation of enhanced guardianship legislation (35). Margaret Bryce, a spokesperson, insisted that the Committee is pressing the provincial government to take over control of the issue because the Committee felt that the province is the more appropriate vehicle for solutions. The Committee has also mobilized action by holding day long forums on the issue, the most recent one being held in June, 1988. The Advocacy Centre for the Elderly (29) recommends the creation of Adult Protective Service Workers, similar to what is presently in place for blind adults. Mandatory reporting is frowned upon by the Centre which argues that the aged have the right to be left alone if they so desire. The Centre also does not want such legislation to be patterned on child abuse legislation. The Ontario Advisory Council on Senior Affairs (32) recommended provincially run temporary shelters for abused elderly, mandatory reporting, registration of identified abusers and province wide reporting and follow up mechanisms for

cases of suspected abuse. Finally, the Ottawa-Carleton Council on Aging (33) recommended increased education, the creation of an ombudsman to investigate abuse and neglect, and the implementation by the Ontario Solicitor General of a mandatory charging policy similar to the one espoused for spousal assault among the 70 recommendations outlined in its final report on elder abuse. The mobilization of action rests with the calls for the government to act to alleviate the problem. It is at this point that the government determines whether the issue will fulfill its potential as a social problem warranting an official response. Interest group dissatisfaction with the state of elder affairs appears to be one reason for the absence of a concise investigation by either the federal or provincial government because there is no unified definition of the problem and mutually agreed upon course of action (15). Spector and Kitsuse (7, p. 148) state, "The more vague the sense of dissatisfaction, the more diffuse and general will be the claim and the less likely will be the recognition or response to the claim."

Presently, elder abuse in Canada has yet to receive a spirited governmental response. Concern with elder abuse is at the edge of the phase Blumer (6) terms the 'formation of an official plan of action', or in the process of entering what is described by Spector and Kitsuse (7) as stage two. In this stage:

> Recognition of the legitimacy of these groups by some official organization, agency or institution. This may

> lead to an official investigation, proposals for action, and the establishment of an agency to respond to those claims and demands. ...
>
> The formal recognition of the group may range from passive acknowledgement of the claim to active attempts to control, regulate, or eliminate the condition at issue in the claim. (7, pp. 142, 148)

Elder abuse at a federal level has only received passive acknowledgement and the federal response to the issue has been very cautious and deliberate. The Department of Justice, Health and Welfare Canada, and the Ministry of the Solicitor General have each acknowledged the issue, but none has yet released specific statements of policy. The Department of Justice has yet to produce a report on the subject in accordance with its recent formal recognition. Health and Welfare Canada's response has been limited to the production of an interim report on the issue, the publication of two issues of a newsletter on family violence, and most recently a national victimization survey (36).

At this stage of issue adoption, Nelson (25) points out that, "decision makers must share a perception of the legitimacy of governmental responsibility for action on the issue." A recent development has been the announcement in 1988 of new initiatives regarding family violence (37). Health and Welfare Canada has received $830,000 in National Health and Development grants for research, development and evaluation of projects dealing with family violence. Elder abuse was recognized as an

area of family violence with $400,000 earmarked for research on the effects of neglect on the health of the elderly. Secretary of State has received funding for outreach activities or issues of violence against women, including the elderly. Justice is responsible for legislative initiatives and research and policy development for all forms of family violence, including elder abuse. Research funds have been set aside to "provide research on the nature and incidence of abuse of the elderly" (37). An interesting part of the federal response has been the insistence that the community take responsibility. What this last statement implies is that elder abuse has been recognized as an area of governmental response by various interest groups across the country. The federal response has been to allocate funds for research and development to community organizations so that the issue is returned to the community. Apparently, elder abuse is not yet a high priority social problem which the federal government sees as crucial to implement action against.

Much the same is evident in the Ontario provincial government. The Office for Senior Citizen Affairs of Ontario, under the Ministry of Senior Citizens' Affairs, is investigating the issue, but has acknowledged that it fails to see the need for a mandatory reporting law. The Office's response to date has largely been in the form of preliminary research and education. Some action, however has been taken regarding the plight of the institutionalized elderly. Amendments to the Ontario Nursing Home Act in 1987 provided for mandatory reporting of all

suspected cases of abuse within such establishments. It follows the clause for reporting in the Child Welfare Act very closely. The issue changes as well when one examines the provincial response to guardianship. The release of the Fram commission report calls for the creation of legislation to give the Ontario government power to appoint a public guardian over those who have been abused (33, p. A3). It is quite evident that the provincial response has been much more focused and direct. This can be explained by the fact that family violence most readily falls under provincial jurisdiction over health and social services. The development of elder abuse as a social problem can be said to be at a phase where governmental response is at a embryonic stage. It can be placed somewhere between 'mobilization' and an official plan of action'(6).

The Formation of Policies and their Implementation:

The final stages in Blumer's developmental model of social problems involve the creation of legislation and other social policy initiatives. While task forces have issued reports, research carried out and recommendations for action have been made in abundance, much less in the way of specific policy has been made and carried out with regard to elder abuse than has been the case for wife battering and child abuse. The limited success of attempts so far to construct elder abuse policy in Canada can be linked in part to conflicting definitions of what elder abuse is and the absence of data on its frequency and

impact. Although a study on elder abuse in Montreal was published in French in 1981 (39), the study which opened the field for continued research and advocacy in Canada was the 1982 Manitoba Council on Aging report on elder abuse by Donna Shell. It estimated that 2-3% of that province's elderly suffered from some form of physical, psychological or financial abuse (42). In the absence of other research, Shell's study became the basis for numerous projections on the extent of the elder abuse problem locally, provincially, and nationally. Most Canadian articles and newspaper accounts have cited Shell's figures in estimating the incidence of elder abuse. Just as the Kempe, et al article (40) is used to date the rediscovery of child abuse, Shell's study and its publication is most commonly used to date the discovery of elder abuse in Canada. A criticism of Shell's Canadian research, however has been its reliance on the sampling of health care professionals' recall of past incidents of abuse to determine the extent of the problem. The first Canadian study to estimate the amount of abuse by polling the elderly themselves has only just now been carried out (36). A major problem for research is the whole question of defining elder abuse. There is wide disagreement as to exactly what should be considered to be elder abuse.

> Presently, there is no one uniform accepted or acceptable definition of elder maltreatment. The definitions vary among professional affiliations, across cultural, ethnic and religious groups and by

geographical locations. The tension between the legal and social work approach to definitions of elder abuse is especially great, lending divergent perspectives in the search for adequate definitional treatment. [1], [2], [3].

In the field of Canadian elder abuse research, the lack of a standardized definition becomes problematic because comparability and corroboration of research findings are a virtual impossibility (42), (43). Gelles (25, p. 350) makes the same point in relation to not just elder abuse but also to the whole field of family violence.[3] This is definitely true for the case of Canadian elder abuse statistics. Elder abuse is usually broken down into the subcategories of abuse and neglect. Abuse, in turn, is further broken down into physical abuse, financial abuse (this would incorporate the financial manipulation of an elder's income or savings), and psychological abuse. Neglect is viewed as being either active or passive. The Toronto Mayor's Committee on Aging incorporates all of these categories into its definition of elder abuse (26). Sheila Purdy of the Toronto based Advocacy Centre for the Elderly notes: "The majority of elderly abuse cases in the community consist of criminal acts and they are covered by the Criminal Code." (44, p. F9) In all the attention given to elder abuse, including calls for increased legislation, there is no mention that every category of the definition is covered by some existing legislation. Though some interest groups including the Toronto Mayor's Committee on Aging,

the Ottawa Carleton Council on Aging and the Ontario Council on Senior Citizens call for new legislation and increased governmental supervision, it is quite possible to deal with much of what is regarded as elder abuse through existing measures. That is to say, if there is a case of assault, an assault charge can be laid; if there is a case of fraud, a fraud charge can be laid.

There is an interesting development in the recognition of elder abuse as a social problem when provincial and federal government initiatives are examined. Herbert Blumer states:

> Social problems are not the result of an intrinsic malfunctioning of a society but are the result of a process of definition in which a given condition is picked out and identified as a social problem. A social problem does not exist for a society unless it is recognized by that society to exist. (6, pp. 301-302)

In the case of elder abuse in Canada, although its existence is recognized by the majority of organizations which purport to represent the interests of the aged, involvement by these organizations has so far been on an individual basis. As well, the various governmental ministries responsible for the problem have not as yet espoused the same level of enthusiasm and governmental response has been extremely cautious.

Interestingly, in the provinces where legislative initiatives have been developed to deal with elder abuse, the

focus has not been on elder abuse alone. Provincial legislation developed in Canada during the 1970's and 1980's, for example has focussed on the needs of all dependent and incompetent adults,[4] not just the elderly (5). Presently, there are five Canadian provinces (Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Alberta and New Brunswick) which have provisions applying to elder abuse. Newfoundland's 1973 An Act Respecting the Welfare of Neglected Adults deals with all adults not capable of properly caring for themselves by reason of physical or mental infirmity. Very similar is Alberta's 1976 Dependent Adults Act. New Brunswick's 1980 Child and Family Services and Family Relations Act contains provisions for the protection of 'elderly, disabled and dependent persons' as well as children. The most recent pieces of legislation - Nova Scotia's 1985 An Act to Provide for Protection of Adults from Abuse and Neglect and Prince Edward Island's 1988 Adult Protection Act, while speaking explicitly of the various forms of abuse and neglect, provide their protection for dependent adults as a class rather than just the elderly (5).

In short, while elder abuse has emerged as a social problem, received some legitimation, and been the subject of efforts to mobilize social action, the formation and implementation of social policies specific to elder abuse has not so readily occurred, particularly at the national level. Governments have preferred to operate with a broad classification of the incompetent, dependent adult which subsumes the various forms of elder abuse within it.

Conclusion:

Analysis of the dynamics of the lobbying process for the recognition of elder abuse as a legitimate social problem within Canada indicates that the pressure comes from lobby groups of social service and health care professionals, rather than from general popular support. Furthermore, involvement by the elderly themselves in this issue has been lacking. The elderly are the key element in the social problem identification/policy development loop which has either not been represented or been overlooked. Rosow (45) makes this point in his assertion that the elderly have two distinct sets of problems: those that older people actually have, and those that experts think they have. This is the situation in which elder abuse exists in Canada presently. Not only have interest groups been involved in the issue in Canada for less than a decade, but many of their efforts are fragmentary and not clearly focused. Given this state of affairs, it is little wonder that the governmental reaction has been cautious and deliberate. Elder abuse is at a stage in its development as a social problem where it can be dropped from the government agenda if interest wanes or does not further develop. Greater legitimation of the issue of elder abuse if it should occur, will probably arise out of the fact that the problems of the aged may gain more prominence as claims about the implications of an aging population gain more prominence. Those who work with the elderly cite elder abuse as a social problem

which will almost certainly receive increased attention. The task of educating the public with regard to the plight of the elderly is not only a major goal of interest groups but also a major reason for their existence. Concern over elder abuse thus far, however, derives more from professional interest group advocacy than from widespread societal reaction or even a popular social movement.

Footnotes

1. The Ottawa-Carleton Council on Aging has recently released a report based on two years of study which calls for increased awareness and education for the public (Ottawa Citizen, Nov. 3, 1988, p. B5)

2. On the role of "horror stories" or "atrocity tales" in drawing attention to issues see Best (27) and Johnson (28).

3. The question of a universal definition of elder abuse is one which has much relevance to the Canadian scene. As recently as June,1988, Catherine Luke of the Ontario Office for Senior Citizen Affairs noted that, at an elder abuse forum organized by the Toronto Mayor's Committee on Aging, a focused group interview technique was used with the intention of agreeing on a common definition and how to tackle the problem by the assembled professionals. After a few hours of debate, a consensus could not be reached even on the definition.

4. Baumann (4, p. 70) notes that a view of the elderly as vulnerable, dependent and even incompetent has been the basis of most legislation in the United States dealing with abuse of the elderly.

References

1. Tierney, K. The Battered Women Movement and the Creation of the Wife Beating Problem. Soc. Probl. 29: 207-217, 1982.

2. Pfohl, S. J. The Discovery of Child Abuse. Soc. Probl. 24: 310-323, 1977.

3. Weisberg, D. K. The 'Discovery' of Sexual Abuse: Experts' Role in Legal Policy Formulation. U. C. Davis Law Review 18: 1-54, 1984.

4. Baumann, E. Research Rhetoric and the Social Construction of Elder Abuse. In Images of Issues: Typifying Contemporary Problems, edited by J. Best, pp. 55-74. Aldine de Gruyter, New York, 1989.

5. Leroux, T., and Petrunik, M. Family Violence Versus Incompetency: Competing Claims and the Role of Experts in the Construction of Canadian Elder Abuse Policy. In Perspectives on Social Problems, edited by J. Holstein and G. Miller, forthcoming.

6. Blumer, H. Social Problems As Collective Behaviour. Soc. Probl. 18(3): 298-306, 1971.

7. Spector, M., and Kitsuse, J. Constructing Social Problems. Aldine De Gruyter, New York, 1987.

8. Best, J. Images of Issues: Typifying Contemporary Problems. Aldine Publishing Company, New York, 1989.

9. Burston, G. R. Granny-Battering. British Medical Journal. 5: 592, 1975.

10. Hudson, M. Elder Mistreatment: Current Research. In Elder Abuse: Conflict in the Family, edited K. Pillemer and R. Wolf, pp. 125-166. Aurburn House Publishing Company, Dover Mass., 1986.

11. Steinmetz, S. The Politics of Aging, Battered Parents. Society. 15(5): 54-55, 1978.

12. Shell, D. Protection of the Elderly. Council on Aging, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1982.

13. Neugarten, B. The Aged in American Society. In Social Problems: A Modern Approach, edited by H. Becker, pp. 167-196. John Wiley and Sons, Inc, New York, 1967.

14. Becker, H. Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance. The Free Press of Glencoe, New York, 1963.

15. Crystal, S. Social Policy and Elder Abuse. In Elder Abuse: Conflict in the Family, edited by K. Pillemer and R. Wolf, pp. 331-340. Aurburn House Publishing Company, Dover, Mass., 1986.

16. Scott, R. A. The Construction of Conceptions of Stigma by Professional Experts. In Deviance & Respectability, edited by J. D. Douglas, pp. 255-290. Basic Books, Inc., New York, 1970.

17. Miller, L. The Professional Construction of Aging. Journal of Gerontological Social Work 10(3/4): 141-153, 1987.

18. Rathbone-McCuan, E., and Hashimi, J. Isolated Elders. Aspen Systems Corporation, Rockville, Maryland, 1982.

19. Straus, M. A. Forward. In The Violent Home: A Study of Physical Violence Between Husbands and Wives, edited by R. J. Gelles, pp. 13-17. Sage, Beverly Hills, 1974.

20. Gelles, R. J. Family Violence. Ann. Rev. Social. 11: 347-367, 1985.

21. Sunderland, G. Older Americans and the Criminal Justice System. National Retired Teachers Association and American Association of Retired Persons, Washington, D.C., 1982.

22. Aday, R. Crime and the Elderly: An Annotated Bibliography. Greenwood Press, New York, 1988.

23. Cox, F. L. Crime and the Elderly: The Emergence of a Policy Issue. In Reactions to Crime, edited by Dan A. Lewis, pp. 123-147. Sage Publications, Beverly Hills, 1981.

24. Jayewardene, C. H. S., Juliani T. J. and Talbot C. K. Planning to Protect the Elderly. CrimCare. Ottawa, Ontario, 1983.

25. Nelson, B. Making An Issue of Child Abuse. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1984.

26. Toronto Mayor's Committee On Aging. Elder Abuse: A Shared Problem. Toronto, 1984.

27. Best, J. Rhetoric in Claims-Making: Constructing the Missing Children Problem. Soc. Probl. 34: 101-121, 1987.

28. Johnson, J. Horror Stories and the Construction of Child Abuse. In Images of Issues: Typifying Contemporary Social Problems, edited by J. Best, pp. 5-19. Aldine de Gruyter, New York, 1989.

29. Wahl, J. Elder Abuse: A Report Presented to the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association. June, 1985.

30. Toronto Globe and Mail. 100,000 elderly Canadians abused a year, panel says. p. A11. March 28, 1986.

31. Vis*avis. Autumn. 1(2):3, 1983.

32. Ontario Advisory Council On Senior Affairs. A Report on Elder Abuse. Submitted to the Office of Senior Citizen Affairs, 1986.

33. Council On Aging of Ottawa-Carleton. Proceedings of the Forum on Elder Abuse. April, 1988.

34. Toronto Globe and Mail. Central Registry on Elder Abuse urged by Study. p. 12. October 26, 1983.

35. Toronto Mayor's Committee On Aging. Guardianship. 1982.

36. Podnieks, E., et al. National Survey on Abuse of the Elderly in Canada: Preliminary Findings. Ryerson Polytechnical Institute, Toronto, 1989.

37. Government of Canada. Federal Gov't Announces New Family Violence Initiatives. News Release. June 1, 1988.

38. Ottawa Citizen. Guardian urged to protect senior citizens. p. A3. October 27, 1988.

39. Belanger, L. Report du comite sur la Violence aux Personnes Agees. Montreal, 1981.

40. Kempe, C. H., et al. The battered-child syndrome. J. Am. Med. Assoc. 181: 107-112, 1962.

41. Valentine, D. and Cash, T. A Definitional Discussion of Elder Maltreatment. Journal of Gerontological Social Work. 9(3): 17-28, 1986.

42. Giordano, N. H. and Giordano, J. Elder Abuse: A Review of the Literature. Social Work. 29(3): 232-236, 1984.

43. Moore, T. and Thompson, V. Elder Abuse: A Review of Research, Programmes and Policy. The Social Worker. 55(3): 115-122, 1987.

44. Ottawa Citizen. Ontario Laws inadequate to Protect Seniors from Elder Abuse, lawyer charges. p. F9. February 21, 1988.

45. Rosow, I. Social Integration of the Aged. The Free Press, New York, 1967.